

The LAY-MONK.

*Si veteres ita miratur laudatq; Poetas,
Ut nihil anteferat, nihil illis comparet, errat.* Hor.

From WEDNESDAY, February 10. to FRIDAY, February 12. 1713.

THERE are no Parts in a Poem which strike the Generality of Readers with so much Pleasure as Descriptions; and there are none in which Poets of an ordinary Rank are more frequently betray'd into Faults. A judicious Description is like a Face which is beautiful without Art; an injudicious one is like a painted Complexion, which often discovers it self, by affecting more Gayety of Colour than is natural.

The Reason why Descriptions make livelier Impressions on common Readers than any other Parts of a Poem, is because they are form'd of Ideas drawn from the Senses, which is sometimes too call'd *Imaging*, and are thus, in a manner, like Pictures, made Objects of the Sight; whereas moral Thoughts and Discourses, consisting of Ideas abstracted from Sense, operate slower, and with less Vivacity. Every one immediately perceives the Resemblance of Nature in the Description of a Tempest, a Palace or a Garden; but the Beauty of proper Sentiments in the Speeches of a Prince, a General, or a Counsellor, is more remote, and discern'd by a kind of second Thought or Reflection.

As Descriptions are all drawn from Objects of the Senses, and the Likeness or Unlikeness of them are easily perceiv'd; so there is a general Similitude in all true Descriptions of the same Object drawn by several Hands, like that in a Picture of the same Person done by several Artists. And yet the Degrees of Likeness and the different Manner of expressing it by those several Artists make a very distinguishable and entertaining Variety. The famous Description of a Horse in the Sixth Book of

Homer's *Iliads*; That in the Fragments of *Ennius*, and That in the Eleventh Book of the *Aeneis*, are indeed the same, the two latter being only Copies of the first. But the Description of the Horse in *Homer* and That in the Book of *Job* are very different, yet both are extremely natural and beautiful.

There is no particular Description which the Writers of Heroick Poetry seem to have labour'd to vary so much as that of the *Morning*. This is a Topick on which they have drawn out all the Copiousness, and even the Luxury of their Fancies. The chastest and most correct Writers seem to indulge themselves on this Occasion in a greater Sport of Imagination; and I had almost said Extravagance, than on any other Subject whatever, as if it were a Tryal of Skill among them who should paint the Morning the most beautifully. I once amus'd my self with drawing together out of several of the best Poets a Variety of these Descriptions, which methought appear'd like so many fine Skies differently colour'd, and interspers'd with Clouds, by the best Masters in Landskip. And I imagine it will not be an unacceptable Entertainment to the Reader, if I here present him with some few out of this Collection of *Morning-Pieces*.

The Morning is most frequently figur'd as a Goddess or divine Person, flying in the Air, unbarring the Gates of Light, and opening the Day. She is drawn by *Homer* in a Saffron Garment, and with Rosy Hands, (which is the Epithet he almost constantly bestows on her) sprinkling Light thro' the Earth. She arises out of the Waves of the Sea, leaves the Bed of *Tithon* her Lover, ascends the

the Heavens, appears to Gods and to Men, and gives Notice of the Sun-Rising. She is plac'd by this Father of the Poets sometimes on a Throne of Gold ; now in a Chariot drawn by swift Horses, and bearing along with her the Day ; and at other times she is usher'd in by the Star which is her Harbinger, and which gives the Signal of the Morning's Approach.

On this, as a Ground, the Poets following Homer have run their Divisions of Fancy : This will appear by the following Instances out of Virgil, which I shall present to the Reader in Mr. Dryden's Translation.

*Aurora now had left her Saffron Bed,
And Beams of early Light the Heav'n's o'erspread.*

*The Morn began from Ida to display
Her Rosy Cheeks, and Phosphor led the Day.*

*And now the rosy Morn began to rise,
And wav'd her Saffron Streamer thro' the Skies.*

*Now rose the ruddy Morn from Tithon's Bed,
And with the Dawn of Day the Skies o'erspread ;
Nor long the Sun his daily Course with-held,
But added Colours to the World reveal'd.*

*The Morn ensuing from the Mountain's Height
Had scarcely spread the Skies with rosy Light ;
Th' Etherial Coursers, bounding from the Sea,
From out their flaming Nostrils breath'd the Day.*

I have not Room here to multiply Examples out of the ancient Poets, but shall shew how the same Images have been copy'd or diversify'd by the Moderns. The following Description is Tasso's, as it is very closely traced in the old Translation of Mr. Fairfax.

*The purple Morning left her crimson Bed,
And donn'd her Robes of pure vermilion Hue ;
Her Amber Locks she crown'd with Roses red,
In Eden's flowery Gardens gather'd new.*

And our own Spencer, who excels in all Kinds of Imagery, following the same Originals, represents the Morning after the like Manner.

*Now when the rosy-finger'd Morning fair,
Weary of aged Tithon's saffron Bed,
Had spread her purple Robes thro' dewy Air,
And the high Hills Titan discovered ;
The royal Virgin shook off Drowsy-head,
And rising forth out of her baser Bower,
Look'd for her Knight——*

*—The Day forth dawning from the East,
Night's humid Curtains from the Heav'n's withdrew,
And early calling forth both Man and Beast,
Commanded them their daily Works renew.*

But of all Descriptions of the Morning as a Person, it is impossible to find a more beautiful one than that of Shakespeare.

*Look where the Morn in Ruffet Mantle clad
Walks o'er the Dew of yon high Eastern Hill.*

The same Author has in another Place embellish'd his Subject thus :

*Look what Streaks
Do lace the severing Clouds in yonder East.
Night's Tapers are burnt out, and jocund Day
Stands tip-toe on the misty Mountain Tops.*

In Milton's *Paradise lost*, the Descriptions of the Morning are drawn with exquisite Beauty, yet some of them retain (tho' in a Christian Poem) a Mixture of the same Mythology.

*Now Morn her rosy Steps in th' Eastern Clime
Advancing, sow'd the Earth with Orient Pearl.*

*The Morn,
Wak'd by the circling Hours, with rosy Hand
Unbarr'd the Gates of Light——
And now went forth the Morn,
Such as in highest Heav'n, array'd in Gold
Empyreal, from before her vanish'd Night
Shot thro' with Orient Beams——*

*Mean-while
To salute the World with sacred Light
Leucothoe wak'd, and with fresh Dews embalm'd
The Earth——
Now sacred Light began to dawn
In Eden on the humid Flowers that breath'd
Their Morning Incense, when all things that breath
From th' Earth's high Altar send up silent Praise
To the Creator, and his Nostrils fill
With grateful Smell——*

In some of these Poetical Pictures which I have here set before the Reader, the Heav'n's only are shewn, and the first springing of Light there. In others the Earth is taken into the Prospect, with her Flowers wet with Dew, and her rising Vapours. And sometimes the Occupations of living Creatures proper to the Season are represented, and afford a yet greater Diversity of amusing Images. Such is that admirable Description in Orway's *Orphan*.

*Wish'd Morning's come, and now upon the Plains,
And distant Mountains where they feed their Flocks,
The happy Shepherds leave their homely Huts,
And with their Pipes proclaim the new born Day.
The lusty Savain comes with his well-fill'd Scrip
Of healthful Viands, which when Hunger calls,
With much Content and Appetite he eats,
To follow in the Field his daily Toil,
And dress the grateful Glebe that yields him Fruits.
The Beasts that under the warm Hedges slept,
And weather'd out the cold bleak Night are up,
And looking tow'rd the neighb'ring Pastures raise
Their Voice, and bid their Fellow Brutes Good Morrow.
The cheerful Birds too on the Tops of Trees
Assemble all in Choirs, and with their Notes
Salute and welcome up the Rising Sun.*

I shall conclude this Paper with a Remark, which I believe will be allow'd by all impartial Criticks, That whoever will take the Pains to look into the several Descriptions of this Kind, which may be found in the Works of ancient and modern Writers, will find that the English Poets have describ'd the Morning with at least as much Elegance of Fancy as any others have done, and with more Variety.